

## Contributed

### THE ELECT INFANT CLAUSE.

By Rev. H. F. Hoyt, D. D.

In answer to the Assembly's overture in regard to the "elect infant clause," the Presbytery of Athens recommends the following answer: First, let the text of the Confession of Faith remain unchanged. Second, let a foot-note be inserted to this effect: This clause does not teach that any dying in infancy are lost. On the contrary, it gives the most Scriptural answer that has ever been given to the question: How are such infants saved? It does not teach the damnation, but the salvation of those dying in infancy.

In support of this recommendation of this Presbytery, and at its request, the writer submits the following reasons for its adoption: First, there can be no objection to this clause as it stands if its meaning is rightly understood, and therefore we would not change its phraseology. It does not teach, even by implication, that any dying in infancy are lost. In proof of this, notice where this clause is found, and the subject under consideration. Chapter three, of the Confession, treats of "who of mankind are saved." Chapter ten of "how they are saved." Now, if infant damnation is taught anywhere in the Confession it would be in Chapter three, but it is not there. Neither is this clause found there, but in Chapter ten, where the question is not who are saved, but how are we saved? Sections one and two answer that it is by the "effectual calling of God by his word and Spirit." This refers, of course, to those capable of hearing the word, and who have reached the age of responsibility. Then the question arises: But what about the little ones who are too young to hear the word, or to be conscious of the operations of the Spirit, how are they saved? Section three answers: "Elect infants dying in infancy are regenerated and saved by Christ through the Spirit." It is telling us, not that our little ones dying in infancy are lost, but how they are saved. It is not teaching infant damnation, but infant salvation.

But why use that word "elect"? Simply because God uses it. He calls all who are saved, whether adults or infants, "elect." It is a Scriptural phrase, and the framers of the Confession are speaking in accordance with the Holy Scriptures in the use of that word. But let it be noticed that the word "elect," as here used, does not teach, even by implication, that any who die in infancy are non-elect and unsaved. It is simply declaring, according to the teachings of God's word, how one class of God's elect, viz., those who die in infancy, are saved. All the saved are at one period of their lives "elect infants," "chosen in Christ Jesus before the foundation of the world." But all elect infants do not die in infancy. Many millions of them live to the age of responsibility, some to maturity, some to old age. Sections one and two tell how they are saved. Others die in infancy, and sec-

tion three tells how they are saved.

But, it is asserted, the very word "elect" implies non-elect. Not necessarily. When in the ritual of the Methodist Church we find (par. 410) the words "elect children of God," does that imply that some of God's children are non-elect? By no means. It is rather expressive of the fact that all the saved are God's "elect children." Neither does the expression "elect infants" in our Confession of Faith imply that any dying in infancy are non-elect and unsaved. The contrast is not between the elect and the non-elect. The qualifying words, "dying in infancy," show this to be the case. The contrast is between elect infants who die in infancy, and elect infants who do not die in infancy. The one class are saved in one way, the other class are saved in a different way. The trouble with many in understanding this clause is found just here: They do not see the real point of contrast. In a recent article in the Observer, the writer says, in substance: "To say that ripe apples are gathered means that the unripe are not gathered. To order the white sheep into the fold, leaves the black ones out." These illustrations are not analogous to the case before us. To make them so, a qualifying clause must be inserted. Suppose we read it thus: "Ripe apples falling to the ground are gathered. White sheep under one year old are to be put in the fold." Now, the contrast is not between ripe apples and unripe, but between ripe apples that fall and ripe apples that do not fall to the ground. The contrast is not between white sheep and black sheep, but between white sheep that are under, and white sheep that are over, a year old. The qualifying words make a wonderful difference in the meaning. So with this clause in our Confession, the qualifying words, "dying in infancy," show that the contrast is not between the elect and non-elect, but between the elect who die in infancy and the elect who live to the age of responsibility. There is no reason for any change in the phraseology of this clause. It contains a very great and precious truth, clearly stated in Scriptural language. We recommend, therefore, that the text of the Confession remain unchanged.

Second, it is a fact that the clause is misunderstood and misrepresented by a great many, both within and without the bounds of the Presbyterian Church. Some, either intentionally or unintentionally, misrepresent and pervert the passage by attaching to the words, "elect infants," of the third section, the phrase, "others not elected," from the fourth section, with the evident intention of making it appear that these latter words have reference to infants. This is a gross misrepresentation, and is inexcusable. Section four has no reference whatever to infants. This is evident from the words immediately following those quoted from section four. It reads: "Others not elected, although they may be called by the ministry of the word." The reference is not to infants, but to others of sufficient age and intelligence to understand the call of God's word, when preached or read. Section three ends all that the Confession has to say

about the future state of infants, while section four has no reference whatever to that class. Because of such misrepresentations, whether intentional or through ignorance, we recommend that an explanatory foot-note be appended, stating clearly the meaning and intention of the clause. This, we think, would silence all objections, and put an end to the continued discussion of this much-vexed question.

Bay Minette, Ala.

### SHOULD THE ELECT INFANT CLAUSE BE REVISED?

A creed should contain, in clear and systematic order, all scripture truths that are directly stated, or that follow by necessary inference.

And note that these are not synonymous requirements; necessary inference does not demand a direct and specific declaration; it is equivalent to an inference beyond a reasonable doubt.

First, then, let us inquire whether we have any direct declaration as to the salvation of infants dying in infancy.

Many of my readers are familiar with Dr. B. B. Warfield's article on Mt. 18: 10, which appeared in the Bible Student some years back. He shows that the old interpretation of "Their Angels," as referring to "guardian angels," is highly improbable; there being no such contemporaneous usage; and away from their charges, "beholding always" the Father's face would not at all suit the idea of a nurse or guardian. Furthermore the similar passage in Acts 12: 15 would point not to a guardian angel, but to our idea of a man's ghost or departed spirit: "If it is not the man, it must be his ghost." We have, then, the direct declaration, "The departed spirits of these little ones do always behold the face of my Father."

Undoubtedly this whole passage (Mt. 18: 1-14, note especially vs. 14; Mt. 19: 13-15) refers primarily to the actual little ones, one of whom Christ had placed immediately before him; and is not to be confined to grown up folks like them in spirit. Certainly as they are the accepted standards, they will not fail to pass muster.

We are unquestionably not inferring too much, when we say that these passages, to which let us add Jonah 4: 11, assure us that our Father has a special care for the little ones, and will save them, if there is any way to do so in consistency with righteousness.

Remembering this, let us inquire, Is there any possible way?

Passing from the only passage which can be interpreted as a direct declaration, let us study the great principles which bear upon this consideration.

First. The Principle of Our Being. We are a race; we are also separate individuals. These are the centripetal and centrifugal tendencies in our being, giving equilibrium. Neither one should be interpreted at the expense of the other.

Second. The Principle of Our Judgment. Light and Opportunity measure responsibility. (See Rom. 2: 12-15, Mt. 7: 1ff, Mt. 11: 20-24, Ezek. 18: and parallel passage.)

This is, to be sure, a much abused